

# NORWAY 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and protects the right to choose, practice, or change one's religion. A hate crime law punishes some expressions of disrespect for religious beliefs. The Council of Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL), an umbrella organization for religious and humanist communities, said a draft law could affect funding for 650 of 800 groups receiving state support; some religious groups expressed concerns the draft law might allow the government to impose conditions on those receiving support. The government continued to implement an action plan to combat anti-Semitism, which included a strategy that addressed anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hate speech through a combination of education, engagement with civil society organizations, and increased support for investigating and prosecuting hate crimes. Representatives from all registered religious communities began a review of the content of mandatory religion and ethics classes in public schools, half of whose content was devoted to Christianity. The government continued to provide exclusive benefits to the Church of Norway, including covering the salaries, benefits, and pensions of clergy and staff. The government provided financial support for interreligious dialogue, including to the Muslim Dialogue Network (MDN), to support dialogue between the Muslim community and other religious or life stance communities.

In 2017, police reported 120 religiously motivated hate crimes, a 24 percent increase from 2016. There were reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim speech on the internet. A rapper used a profanity against Jews during a concert to celebrate diversity, and a major newspaper published an anti-Semitic political cartoon. The MDN replaced the Islamic Council Norway (IRN) as the principal organization representing the Muslim community.

U.S. embassy staff met with officials from the Ministry of Culture (MOC) to discuss the draft law on religion, public financing for faith and life stance organizations, and perceptions by some religious groups of financial preferences for the Church of Norway. Embassy staff discussed with officials from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (MOJ) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) the government's efforts to prosecute religiously based hate crimes. Embassy staff continued to meet with individuals from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), faith groups, including Muslims and Jews, and humanists to discuss religious freedom, integration of minority groups, and life as a religious person.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population of the country at 5.4 million (July 2018 estimate). Statistics Norway, the official government statistics office, estimates that, as of June, 70.6 percent of the population belongs to the Church of Norway, an evangelical Lutheran church. According to Statistics Norway, membership in the Church of Norway has declined by 4.6 percent over the previous four years.

Statistics Norway, which assesses membership in a religious group using specific criteria based on registration, age, and attendance, reports registered membership in religious and life stance communities outside the Church of Norway is approximately 12.3 percent of the population (December 2018 estimate). This includes 6.7 percent belonging to other Christian denominations, of which the Roman Catholic Church is the largest, at 2.9 percent. Muslims account for 3.1 percent of the population. Pentecostal congregations have approximately 39,000 registered members. Buddhists, Sikhs, and Hindus together account for 33,700 registered members. Jewish congregations have approximately 790 registered members.

Approximately 2 percent of the population participates in life stance organizations, nonreligious or philosophical communities with organizational ethics based on humanist values. The Norwegian Humanist Association, with approximately 93,000 registered members, is the largest life stance organization.

Immigrants, whom the statistics bureau defines as those born outside of the country and their children, even if born in Norway, comprise the majority of members of religious groups outside the Church of Norway. Immigrants from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and the Philippines have increased the number of Catholics, while those from countries including Syria, Bosnia, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia have increased the size of the Muslim community. Catholics and Muslims generally have greater representation in cities than in rural areas. Muslims are located throughout the country, but the population is concentrated in the Oslo region.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution states all individuals shall have the right to free exercise of religion, and all religious and philosophical communities shall be supported on equal terms. The constitution also states, “the King shall at all times profess the Evangelical-Lutheran religion,” national values “will remain our Christian and humanistic heritage,” and the Church of Norway shall remain the national church and be supported by the state. The law further specifies the right of individuals to choose or change their religion. Any person over the age of 15 has the right to join or leave a religious community. Parents have the right to decide their child’s religion before age 15, but they must take into consideration the views of their children once they reach the age of seven and give those views priority once the children reach the age of 12.

By law, the government provides direct financial support to the Church of Norway as a block grant in the national budget and covers the cost of salaries, benefits, and pension plans of Church employees. Municipal governments also provide direct support to individual Church of Norway congregations.

The penal code specifies penalties, including a fine or imprisonment for up to six months, for discrimination based on religion and expressions of disrespect for religious beliefs or members of religious groups. In practice, the government applies penalties for disrespect for religious beliefs only in cases of incitement to violence.

All registered religious and life stance organizations are eligible to apply for financial support from the government. Nearly 800 such organizations receive state support, based on the number of each group’s members. To register, a faith or life stance organization must notify the county governor and provide its creed and doctrine, activities, names of board members, names and responsibilities of group leaders, operating rules – including who may become a member – voting rights, and the processes for amending statutes and dissolution. A group registers nationally only once in one county but reports its national tally of members. If a religious group does not register, it does not receive financial support from the government, but there are no restrictions on its activities. By law, life stance communities, but not religious groups, must have a minimum of 500 members to qualify for government funding.

Public schools continue to include a mandatory course on Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information (CKREE) for grades one through 10. State-employed instructors teach the CKREE course, which covers world religions and philosophies while promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs, as well

as for atheism. Up to 50 percent of the CKREE course content is devoted to Christianity. Students may not opt out of this course. Schools do not permit religious ceremonies, but schools may organize religious outings, such as attending Christmas services at a local Church of Norway church. At their parents' request, children may opt out of participating in or performing specific religious acts, such as a class trip to a church. The parents need not give a reason for requesting an exemption. Students may apply to be absent to celebrate certain religious holidays, such as an Eid or Passover, but there is no celebration or observance of these holidays in public schools.

In June parliament passed a law banning the wearing of clothing that partially or fully covers the face at educational institutions. The law bans students and teachers from wearing burqas and *niqabs* in schools and daycare centers.

The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombudsman (LDO), who is appointed by the government for a six-year term and heads a government-funded but independent office, reviews cases of religious discrimination. Anyone may file a complaint with the ombudsman. The ombudsman publishes nonbinding findings, which provide the basis for legal investigations and follow-up, in response to complaints that a person or organization has violated a law or regulation within the ombudsman's mandate. The ombudsman also provides advice and guidance on antidiscrimination law.

A revision of the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, which prohibits discrimination based on religion and other factors, became effective on January 1. The revision consolidates several previous statutes. It also shifts the responsibility for monitoring, investigating and enforcing certain categories of discrimination and hate crimes from the LDO to police to contain within the criminal justice system those forms of discrimination that may result in criminal prosecution and be subject to appellate review.

Individuals may apply for a full exemption from the required registration for a year of military service for religious reasons and are not required to perform alternative service.

According to the law, an animal must first be stunned or administered anesthetics before slaughter, making most traditional kosher and halal slaughter practices illegal. Halal and kosher meat may be imported.

Foreign religious workers are subject to the same visa and work permit requirements as other foreign workers.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### **Government Practices**

Debate continued over a draft law governing religious life, first proposed in 2017. If enacted in its original form, the law would potentially require religious groups, as well as life stance groups, to have at least 500 members to be eligible for government funding. The government collected public comments about the draft law, and parliament was expected to take it up for debate in the spring of 2019. In response to criticism from numerous churches and NGOs, the STL said it believed the draft would be revised to significantly lower or eliminate the minimum membership requirement. According to the STL, if the membership requirement remained, it could disqualify approximately 650 of the 800 religious communities receiving state funding from future support.

If enacted, the proposed law would codify the legal status and funding support structures for the Church of Norway and other religious groups, following the formal separation of the Church of Norway from the government. The Church of Norway would retain financial support from the government under the proposed law, including for maintaining historic church buildings and certain administrative expenses. Religious communities and those who worked on interreligious dialogue said the MOC had developed the proposed law without a preceding white paper on religion and life stance policies. In response to those complaints, the government began preparing a white paper, with the participation of stakeholders, scheduled for publication in early 2019. Some religious and life stance communities, such as the Norwegian Humanist Association and the STL, continued to say the proposed law would provide preferential financial treatment for the Church of Norway, giving it disproportionately large grants that, unlike other groups, would not depend on the size of its membership.

The STL and the Norwegian Humanist Association also expressed concerns the proposed law would no longer contain a provision stating there would be no restrictions on a religious organization's activities as a condition of receiving state funding. These groups said that without such protection, the government could impose social requirements as a condition for receiving state support. For example, the STL stated the government might require Muslim religious

communities to prohibit women from wearing burqas and *niqabs* in public to qualify for state support.

The government continued to ban the wearing of religious symbols, including religious headwear, with police uniforms. The military and other uniformed organizations besides police allowed use of religious headwear.

Most chaplains in the armed forces were members of the Church of Norway and trained to accommodate members of different faiths. The armed forces commissioned Christian, Muslim, and humanist chaplains as officers in the military. In September the Ministry of Defense said it was committed to recruiting chaplains of different faiths to better serve the diverse religious needs of its military personnel. Religious and humanist groups could provide chaplains at their expense in hospitals and prisons.

The government continued to implement its action plan to counter anti-Semitism in society. The plan emphasized data collection, training and education programs in schools, research on anti-Semitism and Jewish life in the country, and efforts to safeguard Jewish culture. As part of the plan, police authorities announced they were implementing changes to their training curriculum to improve the reporting, processing, and investigation of religiously based hate crimes. Police also began collecting statistics on hate crimes, including anti-Semitic incidents, as required under the plan. These statistics, which included information on prosecutions and convictions, were scheduled to become available in 2019 and 2020.

NGOs and religious communities worked with police and other government agencies to facilitate more reporting and cooperation. The Oslo Synagogue worked with the National Police to coordinate security for the synagogue and Jewish heritage sites and acted as an intermediary between the Jewish community and police to facilitate timely reporting and monitoring of hate crimes. The MDM worked with the National Police to provide outreach and education to encourage Muslims, some of whom were members of immigrant communities that distrusted law enforcement, to report discrimination and hate crimes to the proper authorities. The Antiracism Center (*Antirasistisk Senter*) provided training and advisory services to police on detecting, investigating and prosecuting both racial and religiously motivated hate crimes. Police assigned personnel to support and coordinate these efforts, including providing resources to maintain hate crime investigators in each of the country's 12 police districts.

The LDO, as well as NGOs such as FRI – Association for Gender and Sexual Diversity, encouraged the government to improve consistency of data collection and reporting of hate crimes, including religiously motivated hate crimes, for police districts outside of Oslo.

The Ministry of Local Government and Modernization continued to provide funding for security at the Mosaic Religious Community (*Det Mosaiske Trossamfund* – DMT) facility and synagogue in Oslo. The DMT continued to maintain a dialogue with the MOJ and police to ensure proper safeguarding of the DMT's facilities.

The National Criminal Investigation Service continued to maintain a website for the public to contact police regarding hate crimes and hate speech, including religiously motivated incidents.

A Ministry of Education and Research-commissioned committee composed of members from the major registered religious and life stance communities began to review the content of the CKREE course during the year as part of an overall review of the national curriculum. The STL said the process for reviewing and updating the curriculum was fair and effective.

As part of the Action Plan Against Anti-Semitism, the existing CKREE curriculum included a component on the Jewish faith, and the history curriculum included teaching on the Holocaust. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Research continued grants for school programs that raised awareness about anti-Semitism and hate speech, including religiously motivated hate speech. The government also continued to fund a Jewish life module through which young Jews engaged with high school students about Judaism and being Jewish in the country. The government provided funding to the Holocaust Center, an independent research and educational center associated with the University of Oslo, to design and release two online educational platforms on anti-Semitism and Jewish heritage and culture.

Schools nationwide observed Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27. Schools continued to support an extracurricular program that took secondary school students to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in Poland and other Nazi concentration camps to educate them about the Holocaust.

Although the Holocaust Center and DMT leadership said the government's anti-Semitism plan could have gone further, they were generally positive about the

plan, stating it allocated resources to education about anti-Semitism in society and focused attention on efforts to counter it.

In response to the effective ban on the production of most kosher and halal meat in the country according to the law on animal slaughter, the Ministry of Agriculture continued to waive import duties and provide guidance on import procedures to both the Jewish and Muslim communities.

The government continued implementation of its strategy to combat hate speech. The strategy contained elements that addressed anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic hate speech using educational programs, provided support to religious and civil society groups engaged in promoting religious tolerance, expanded efforts to encourage reports of hate crimes by victims, and called for more focused legal efforts to investigate and prosecute hate crimes.

The government provided approximately 2.5 billion kroner (\$288.02 million) to the Church of Norway during the year, including for pensions and benefits of church employees and clergy. The MOC stated the grant to the Church would continue at a high level after the removal of its employees from the state payroll following the Church's separation from the government in 2017. The government provided other registered religious and life stance organizations approximately 344 million kroner (\$39.63 million) in total. Some representatives from these groups, including the STL and Norwegian Humanist Association, stated the size of the grant to the Church of Norway was not based on the size of its membership, and that the Church's privileged relationship with the state continued.

Consistent with previous years, the MOC provided two million kroner (\$230,000) to religious umbrella organizations, such as the Christian Council of Norway (500,000 kroner [\$57,600]), MDN (500,000 kroner [\$57,600]), and STL (one million kroner [\$115,000]), among others, to promote dialogue and tolerance among religious and life stance organizations. Groups outside these umbrella organizations also applied for funding for specific events and programs to support interreligious dialogue.

The Catholic Church's civil suit alleging the government underpaid the subsidy it owed the Church based on its membership size remained pending. The District Court in Oslo ruled against the Catholic Church in 2017, but the Church appealed the decision to the Borgarting Court of Appeal, also in Oslo, which was expected to hear the case in January 2019.

The government continued to conduct workshops and other intervention programs targeting practitioners working with groups that included members of religious minorities to promote their economic and social integration into society. Efforts focused on youth education and engaging local community stakeholders. For example, the government provided financial support to the Forum for Integration and Dialogue (FIDA), an NGO. Founded by the Muslim Union, this organization worked to integrate youth from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and encourage positive relationships among diverse groups in the Kristiansand community. The government also funded the program for “democratic preparedness against racism, anti-Semitism and undemocratic attitudes,” which provided speakers, resources, and training to teachers working with at-risk youth to advance these objectives.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Police reported 112 religiously motivated hate crimes throughout the country, a decrease of 6.7 percent compared with 2017. Police statistics did not cite specific examples of these crimes. According to police, the increase in reported religiously motivated crimes over the previous five years (there were 28 reported in 2014) reflected an increased willingness among minority groups to report hate crimes to police. In a separate survey released during the year, police stated the proportion of victims who reported any kind of hate crime to police had increased from 21 to 30 percent between 2016 and 2017.

In April the Supreme Court upheld a criminal conviction of a man for using anti-Muslim hate speech in an altercation in 2015 with two Muslim residents from the Middle East. Even though the defendant argued self-defense, the court held that using racial and anti-Muslim epithets was still subject to criminal sanction regardless of who started the physical altercation.

The Holocaust Center and the leader of the DMT reported anti-Semitism remained prevalent among far-right and far-left groups. The center and the leader of the DMT also said groups widely considered anti-Semitic, and in many instances also anti-Muslim, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement (with an estimated 100-200 members in the country), were well funded and maintained a strong online presence.

Police and NGOs such as the Holocaust Center and DMT, as well as Nordic Information of Gender and the Antiracism Center, said religiously motivated hate speech, particularly online, remained prevalent.

As in previous years, the DMT expressed concern about what it viewed as continued tolerance for anti-Semitic expression in national media and cited an increased presence of anti-Semitism online. It said there were websites that tended to espouse an extreme, far-right ideology including the anti-Semitism and racism traditionally associated with the Nazis. The DMT added the sites appeared to mix news content from mainstream sources and far-right sources to create an impression of professionalism and legitimacy, and many articles often advanced dubious claims and conspiracies. For example, it reported some articles stated Orthodox Jews in Israel were protecting pedophiles or that researchers were developing drugs to make persons susceptible to pro-immigration propaganda to undermine their own culture.

According to the Holocaust Center, anti-Muslim organizations such as Stop Islamization of Norway – with an estimated 2,500-3,000 members or supporters, Human Rights Service, and the online forum Document.no increased their activity during the year, including by writing articles online or in print media. The Holocaust Center stated the groups were relatively small but maintained a strong and well-organized presence on the internet. In many instances, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant views were closely linked.

In June Kaveh Kholardi, a Norwegian rapper hired by the City of Oslo to sing at an event intended to celebrate diversity, asked during his performance if there were Jews in the audience and said, “[expletive] Jews,” followed by a pause, after which he added, “just kidding.” The City of Oslo condemned the incident, and DMT leader Ervin Kohn demanded an apology. Subsequently, Kholardi apologized. Media coverage also criticized Kholardi and cited the condemnations by the city of Oslo and Kohn.

In August the national newspaper *Dagbladet* published an editorial cartoon depicting Benjamin Netanyahu with a body shaped like a swastika. The illustration accompanied a commentary piece citing anger among Israeli Druze over what the article described as a new Israeli law calling Israel the “nation-state of the Jewish people.” The DMT and the Israeli Embassy in Oslo both issued statements condemning publication of the cartoon.

The MDN replaced the IRN as the largest umbrella organization representing Muslims. The MDN was established in 2017 by five mosques that had severed ties with the IRN – the Islamic Federation (Rabita), Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albanian Islamic Cultural Center, Islamic Cultural Center, and Center Rahma. These five organizations had comprised more than half of the IRN’s membership, and their departure left the IRN without its previous standing in the Muslim community. The MDN announced its intention to join the STL and began working with the group as a nonmember in October.

The Holocaust Center continued to conduct programs on the Holocaust and to combat anti-Semitism, with financial support from the government. The center developed instructional materials on tolerance of religious diversity and distributed them to high schools nationwide. It published numerous articles and books documenting anti-Semitism and the persecution of religious minorities throughout the world. The center developed an independent educational website that provided a comprehensive overview of anti-Semitism and served as a foundation for the center’s educational efforts. It also screened materials used in public schools for anti-Semitic content. In addition, the center continued to operate a museum and library supported by its research organization and offer a wide range of educational materials, programs, exhibitions, and publications.

The Holocaust Center played a significant role in the Action Plan Against Anti-Semitism by developing educational materials and online platforms for the Ministry of Education and monitoring anti-Semitic (and anti-Muslim) attitudes throughout society. It conducted research on Jewish life in the country and on anti-Semitism in Scandinavia, religious extremism and radicalization, and hate crimes, both on its own initiative and on behalf of parliament and government ministries, and advised the STL. The center’s staff frequently spoke out in the media as legal, policy, or historical experts about the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, religious issues, and ethnic/religious oppression and genocide internationally.

The STL continued to foster interfaith dialogue. Its mandate was to promote the equal treatment of religious and life stance communities and respect and understanding among all individuals and religions and life stance communities through dialogue. It received support from the government, as well as financial and in-kind contributions from its member organizations.

In October Nortura, one of the country’s largest meat producers, terminated its agreement with IRN whereby IRN certified some meat Nortura produced as halal.

After the termination of this agreement, there were no major, halal-certified meat producers in the country.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

U.S. embassy staff met with officials from the MOC who worked on religious issues. The discussions centered on the proposed law on religion, public financing for faith and life stance organizations, and perceptions by some religious groups of financial preferences for the Church of Norway. Embassy staff regularly met with the special envoy for freedom of religion at the MFA. Embassy representatives also met with officials from the MOJ, as well as the MFA, to discuss efforts to track, investigate, and prosecute religiously based hate crimes.

The Ambassador visited the Holocaust Center in Oslo in October and discussed religious freedom and anti-Semitism with its director and senior researchers. The Charge d'Affaires, along with the Israeli Ambassador and the head of the Oslo synagogue, spoke on the importance of religious freedom at a ceremony at the synagogue to commemorate the lives of those lost during the attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in October.

In November the Ambassador attended a lunch and meeting in Kristiansand with Muslim leaders and youth at NGO FIDA to discuss integration, diversity, and crime prevention with local Muslim leaders.

To mark Religious Freedom Day in January, the embassy hosted an Interfaith Youth Roundtable that encouraged interfaith dialogue among youth members of Oslo's Lutheran and Catholic churches, synagogue, Sunni and Ahmadiyya mosques, and the Humanist Association. Discussion topics included freedom of religion and speech, immigration, and the role of religion, culture, and tradition in the country's life.

In April the embassy hosted a seminar debating religious freedom in the country, from an academic and political point of view, in the aftermath of the separation of the Church Of Norway from the state. The Ambassador highlighted religious freedom as the backbone of U.S. society and welcomed the debate on the role and importance of religion in a secularized society.

Embassy staff engaged religious and civil society groups to discuss their efforts to promote religious tolerance in the country, including the STL, DMT, MDN, Islamic Community Centre – Norway, Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Humanist

Association of Norway, Amnesty International – Norway, Peace Research Institute Oslo, International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Antiracism Center, and Holocaust Center.